



Northwest Philadelphia's Leading Community Newspaper

{ The Chestnut Hill Local .com }

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Battle off Germantown

The intersection of Willow Grove and Germantown avenues is not what it once was.

At each corner stands an impressive building with commercial use on the first floor and residential above. On the northeast side is the Lorenzon building, named for one of the great Italian craftsman families of Chestnut Hill that built it. Across Willow Grove Avenue is a building designed by local architect John P.A. Todd, a modern marvel compared to the Lorenzon building. Both are impressive.

Right now, there are corner vacancies in all four buildings at the intersection except for Todd's building — it no longer houses the architect's offices but instead is the practice of local doctor, Marc Newman.

There are some signs of life. Bowman Properties is working on the ground floor of the Lorenzon building. Work seems to be under way across Germantown Avenue on the old location of The Brass Boudoir, which may soon, I hear, house a nail salon of some kind.

It's an intersection in desperate need of life. Soon it will have some. Or maybe not.

Just west at 12 W. Willow Grove Ave., residents are drawing battle lines over the proposal of Hill resident Jennifer Zoga. Zoga's plans to build a high-end convenience store rallied numerous — at last count, 72 — neighbors in opposition.

As is typical of these kinds of fights — and I've seen many of them in covering Chestnut Hill for 10 years — neighbors have sounded shrill alarms. They say that the Good Food Market will wreak havoc on the neighborhood, that the market will make traffic unbearable and might even pose a safety risk.

Critics writing this week (see letters, below) argue that the neighbors opposed to Zoga's plans are out of touch — not only with the neighborhood but with the general business climate. If you didn't want a lot of traffic and disruption, why live a block from Germantown Avenue? And why should anyone in Chestnut Hill not want a new business, especially a food market that would be a great convenience to many of the neighbors now opposed?

Why do these battles break out so quickly and why are they always filled with hyperbolic saber-rattling?

Opponents are not being dishonest. They really believe their quality of life and property values are at stake. They have a right to be worried about a new business and deserve to have their concerns addressed — something Zoga promised to do on this page last week.

But in order to be taken seriously, opponents of the Good Food Market should have a realistic view of the property. Filling it with a business with long hours might be a traffic headache, but it will make the corner safer. A well-lit and populated convenience store is much better, as far as safety is concerned, than a dark and empty warehouse.

The building in which Zoga wants to open her Good Food Market is zoned C-1 Commercial, allowing a vast number of uses, some potentially more intrusive to residents on Willow Grove Avenue. That building will be the home of a business eventually. Neighbors should ask themselves if a food store is really what they want to fight.

Pete Mazzaccaro

Strong community association requires participation by everyone

by WALTER SULLIVAN

The big news, and very good news, is that Larry Hochberger began working for us June 15 as associate publisher of our Local. We welcome him on board.

This is a big job: "The Associate Publisher is responsible for the operations of the newspaper. Specifically, ... [he] oversees a paper's advertising, production, and circulation departments. He ... is responsible for increasing advertising, advancing circulation, and implementing effective production processes. The Associate Publisher is responsible for controlling expenses as well as enhancing revenues."

As such, Larry is the top supervisor of all Local employees with the exception of the six who work for us with the editor in our editorial department. This is not just a desk job. Already last week, Larry was out on the street meeting and greeting and listening, reaching out, not only to potential advertisers but also very much to you our readers, the members of our community.

He will continue in that way to reach out each week. I invite you to reach out to him with your ideas at Larry@chestnuthilllocal.com. Larry is exceptionally qualified for the job, with more than 25 years of media management experience in advertising, publishing, legal, printing, marketing and promotion, and also in reporting, writing and editing.

I invite you to join us Thursday night, June 25, when your board of directors meet. See the agenda, which appears on page two of this edition. We will hear a presentation by a representative of our city government on a new special and very temporary program under which our community may receive funding for certain projects beneficial to you. Such projects include "curb bump outs" that would narrow streets as they approach intersections with ordinarily larger streets (e.g., Mermaid Lane and Winston Road into Germantown Avenue.)

The "bump outs" would, by funneling the traffic into narrower spaces, reduce speeding. Those projects also include tree plantings to enhance proper water runoff, as well as other water runoff measures. This funding is available to us only if we the community apply for it this summer, preferably by July 31.

So, I ask you now to e-mail to me, with specific locations and rationale, your ideas for such projects. I shall refer these matters, along with all your ideas, to your Traffic, Transportation and Parking Committee for action when they meet July 6 under Tom Hemphill as chair, and to your Development Review Committee, chaired by Larry McEwen and Greg Woodring, when it meets July 14. I will task those committees to report back with four or five specific projects to your board when they next meet on July 23.

Over a half century ago in 1954, our firefighter Louis Mortimer died in the line of duty at our firehouse at Highland Avenue and Shawnee Street. A few years ago, the city began the practice of erecting a plaque at the place where every police officer and firefighter perished in the line of duty. Mr. Mortimer's 90-year-old widow hopes before she dies to see the plaque memorializing her late husband placed in front of our firehouse.

The cost to do this for her and for us is only about \$1,500. The Bocce Club has launched this effort with a generous contribution. Chestnut Hill Business Association and your Chestnut Hill Community Association are contributing. We could probably raise the money by appealing just to your board members, but that would not be right. Rather, in addition, you, the people of the community that Mr. Mortimer served, should be given the opportunity to participate.

Please mail your small checks payable to CHBC Plaque Program to our administrative coordinator, Noreen Spota, here at Town Hall at 8434 Germantown Avenue, Philadelphia, PA 19118.

Now some thoughts on your Board of Directors.

Who are they? 41 dedicated volunteers, 34 of them elected directly by you the community in April of each year to three-year terms. Our bylaws welcome as members all people committed to the future of Chestnut Hill whether they live in Chestnut Hill proper or beyond. Even so, 28 of your 34 directors at-large live right here in Chestnut Hill, while four live in Wyndmoor, two in Mount Airy, one in Roxborough, and one on the nearby Main Line.

Next April, you will elect only eight directors at-large. 11 incumbents' terms expire in 2010 and, if new people run, we may have a contested election, which is a good thing. In addition to those 34, four are designated by organizations on whose boards CHCA has reciprocally a member. They are the CHBA, the Parking Foundation, The Historical Society and Teenagers, Inc. All four of those organizations, which hold permanent interlocking seats on your board serve the people right here in Chestnut Hill.

In addition, on a temporary two-year basis, your board elects institutions in our community to designate representatives to serve on your board. At present, those institutions are the Mount Airy Learning Tree, Friends of the Fountain Plaza and Chestnut Hill Center for Enrichment (formerly always the Senior Center and formerly for a brief period the Life and Learning Center). Our Mother of Consolation parish community also holds such a seat and we are waiting for that community to designate a successor representative to your board of directors.

Whom do they represent? The people, whether they are members or not, who live and

work in Chestnut Hill. Because it is important to those residents that our business district thrives, your board of directors works along with the CHBA and the BID to support that. But we do not primarily represent those businesses here, the CHBA does.

Whom do they serve? Those residents right here in Chestnut Hill, and nobody else, by myriad programs and activities, in addition to our Local, which I will in future editions describe to you. We need you to know about them. More than that, we need you to participate as fully as you can in them. No community organization can succeed in fulfilling its mission without the active engagement of the community and without the active participation of as many as possible in the community.

A post-modest proposal

by JOEL HOFFMANN

Warning: This column may contain material unsuitable for the humorless and the clueless. Reader indiscretion is advised.

Good news, ladies and gentlemen: I've solved the city's budget crisis and circumvented a strike, without seeking any input from the governor or the mayor or the unions.

It turns out that I can run the entire city on \$100 million a year — or was it \$100,000? — by outsourcing all government services and functions to Mumbai, India.

The patronage system of awarding jobs will be modified — I will exclusively hire my future wife's relatives — but otherwise there will be complete continuity of service.

Current city employees will go on permanent furlough, premature retirement or [insert euphemism].

Instead of pension payments and continuous healthcare, they will receive complimentary meal tickets for Ruby Tuesday — 52 for each year of service to the city — and a lifetime membership to Bally's gym. (Disclaimer: New benefits program valid only in Mumbai.)

Republicans will appreciate the city's newfound commitment to personal responsibility. Democrats will find a fresh array of injustices to complain and pontificate about.

I now submit to you a sneak preview.

Trash Collection

Mayor Michael Nagheenanajar has agreed to dispatch trash collectors (i.e., his relatives in America) semi-yearly. Still, we assure you that odor will not be an issue. The good people at Lysol have agreed to modify the city's fire hydrants, allowing the sanitation contractors in Mumbai to remotely deodorize the air once a week.

How's that for progress?

Philly 311

If Mumbai call centers can handle your credit card inquiries, why can't the call reps answer questions about a city they've toured virtually on Google Earth?

Their infrastructure is impressive and wage rates are bargain-basement. They're ready to direct you from 7,885 miles away.

Homelessness

Sure, India is a little crowded, with 1.17 billion people sharing a land mass about one-third the size of the United States, but Mayor Nagheenanajar has assured me that we can end homelessness in Philly by rounding up the city's 3,100-plus transients and shipping them to textile factories, where they will receive room and board in exchange for 14-hour workdays and crippling arthritis.

On second thought, maybe some of them could operate the 311 help line. I mean, who knows the streets better than the homeless?

Logistics

All of this and more will be implemented, abruptly, by a team of misanthropic technicians — probably sometime in the next 10 business days.

Until then, we ask that you proceed with your daily routine — unless you want to go to the library (closed indefinitely) ... or visit the Liberty Bell (hanging in the mess hall at Nagheenanajar Denim Factory) ... or ride your bike through Fairmount Park (now owned and operated by Nagheenanajar Tree and Venison Culling Inc.)

Or maybe you could just watch TV for a while.

A Walk on the Wild Side

"If there is a miracle on this planet, it is contained in water." — Loren Eiseley

by HUGH GILMORE

Days and days of heavy, unrelenting rain had kept me indoors for nearly a week. Confined and restless, feeling impatient, some vague yearning that bordered on melancholy began making me feel I was missing out on something important.

Last Tuesday, around noon, the rain gave way to a mist. A sweatshirt was enough, a hat unnecessary if I wanted to feel my face brush through it as I walked. I hurried down to the Wissahickon, choosing the Northwestern Avenue approach, the loneliest and most solemn part of the entire trail.

I parked and walked through the clearing onto the wide, cindered path that runs above the creek. At the point where the trees first form an arcade, I felt ... not so much that I had entered, but that I'd been absorbed ... into the emerald beauty of the woods.

Anyone who has not grown up near a northeastern deciduous forest with a living creek running through it can never know the wild, overgrown, luxurious mixture of thick, sweet scents that flood the brain as you enter. I began walking, happy to be out of my cage and off the leash.

Almost at once I sensed the thick smell of a horse hovering in the air. Where? I looked. Nothing ahead, nothing behind. An odor with an almost-palpable shape, left to linger in the thin mist, as though this fellow animal's spirit remained here unseen. I walked quickly for the first few minutes, barely able to restrain my desire to get to that high point above the creek where I like to watch the show.

"The Show," is the creek in flood. Swollen, surging over its banks, it carries the world away in its wild, unstoppable surge. I have been in love with the sight of it since I was a child. And like many kinds of love, it has fear at the heart of it. I am drawn to it and could watch for hours.

I had arrived too late to see the flood crest. Hundreds of logs and branches of wildly different sizes bobbed in a jam caught in the rocks below. Over on the newly formed beach

a long, absurdly fat log, lay stranded. Obviously carried here against its will, it sat like an upended statue, a tribute to the force and depth of the water just hours ago.

I stood leaning against the rail while my mind drifted to a memory of when I'd first been fascinated by such sights. The image I remembered was of the rain-swollen, torrential Mississippi River and Huck Finn's dangerous and abusive Pap. I was only nine years old, but I'd read a lot of Mark Twain by then, mostly because the Twains and a one-volume Poe were all we had (courtesy of a door-to-door salesman). I liked Tom Sawyer a lot, but I kept coming back to Huck Finn. That book's river scenes shook me into recognizing at a young age some deeper knowledge I sensed and feared about the dangerous world of adults and emotions and loss of control and jumped boundaries. I was fascinated, almost rapt, whenever I had to cross the two principal creeks of my life, Cobbs Creek and Darby Creek, following a rainstorm. This merging of people, books, and nature has affected how I think ever since.

I straightened up from leaning on the guardrail and walked farther downstream. The lower branches of the trees on the banks held collections of twisted vines and leaves left from the high water. Now these tangles drooped three feet above the swift, brown current, souvenirs of the great rush.

A minute later I came upon a violently created clearing where a huge tree had recently fallen out of the bank. Half of its thick crown — I think it was a maple — lay in the water below, disturbing the flow. Along the steep bank several smaller trees had been snapped and taken down by this fallen giant. Similar evidence of dead trees from other times lay all about. I turned and looked about, certain of only one nervous thought: every single one of those stately, struggling trees would be joining them on the forest floor sooner or later.

I stood in the rain, trying to comprehend this scene in a larger sense, as though I were an accident reconstructor, or a student of the Big Bang, someone who works backwards to see how this big mess came about.

When the Disney/National Geographic blinders come off, a very wild nature can be seen surrounding us, even in a city park. The Wissahickon woods are not a static diorama that exists for our admiration, waiting to serve our needs. The forest and hills, even the rocks, are alive and always in motion, always changing. You just need a larger time sense and a little imagination to realize how active this scene is. And when you go down to the woods and stand looking at the creek after a heavy rainfall you also realize that the word "water" is at its essence a very dynamic verb.

On the way home, I felt as though I had just reread a great book. Part saga, part romance, certainly a mystery.

Oh to know the beginning or the end. Or even whether we stand watching from a point closer to one end or the other.

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